LANSING, KANSAS – 1982

"It is going to be big. Huge. The biggest thing to happen in Kansas since *Prime Cut*," Archer Olson said between mouths full of chili fries. We were sitting at Dairy Queen scarfing down burgers and shakes courtesy of Archer's smoking hot mom: a petite Puerto Rican with silky black hair down to her waist, big dark eyes, and a dazzlingly bright smile. Minutes prior, Mrs. Olson had spotted us – Virgil Templeton, Brian Moody, and me – walking down Highway 7 on our way back from the school's basketball courts. She'd pulled over and offered us a ride as we all lived in the same subdivision.

And that's how we found ourselves breaking bread and talking movies with Archer Olson – a fellow classmate whom none of us really cared for. I suppose he was okay in small doses, but his attitude ran towards snotty, and he complained way too much for somebody who wasn't, technically speaking, a female dog. Nevertheless, Archer's mom more than made up for his personal shortcomings with her hospitality, charm, and beauty. Having collected us in the backseat of her brand-new Buick Regal, the ever-ebullient Mrs. O. checked us in the rear view, commented on how hot we looked, and then insisted on taking us for some frozen treats.

Brian Moody, elbows on the table, bicep muscles bulging under his black skin, took a massive bite out of his triple-decker hamburger. Three quick chews, a ripple down his throat, and then he raised his intense brown eyes and asked, "Prime Cut?"

"Lee Marvin?" Archer replied with an exasperated tone, as if he couldn't believe he had to explain such a thing. "Gene Hackman? Sissy Spacek before she became all famous?"

Brian looked bewildered. He missed a lot of cultural references because his mother was a strict Catholic and, as such, didn't see much call for unnecessary foolishness like movies and music. Not that she expressly forbade these things, but she generally managed to keep such worldly distractions away from her children through a strict and enveloping regimen of church, chores, grades, sports, etc. When the Devil went looking for idle hands, he walked right past Mrs. Moody's house without even tipping his hat.

"A movie," I explained to Brian. "It was set in Kansas."

"It was *filmed* in Kansas," Archer corrected me. "They hired local people to act in it and some of them went on to have careers in Hollywood."

“And you think you can get a role in this movie they’re filming over in Lawrence?” Virgil asked, his voice just this side of condescending.

“*The Day After*,” Archer beamed. “The movie is called *The Day After* and, yes, I do think I can get a part. If I can only get there.” He glared at his mother.

“I’m very sorry, baby,” she said in that heartbreaking Spanish accent of hers. “But I tol’ choo. I need the car that day. I juss start class and I canna miss my firs’ week.”

Lord I just wanted to start at her toes and eat her all the way up.

Mrs. O. refocused her attention on her lime-green Mr. Misty float, slipping the straw between her perfect teeth and giving a suck that caused her cheeks to cave in and her lips to pucker. Mr. Misty, you lucky old bastard! Suddenly, a loud slurping sound escaped from the cup and her wide, dark eyes popped with surprise. She caught me watching and smiled around the straw.

I smiled back. *Tee hee. That was funny.*

See, Mrs. Olson liked me. And, no, this isn’t a horny delusion talking. She liked me for the same reason most parents liked me: I made good grades, never got into trouble, and was always respectful to adults. It was enough to make her think I’d be a good influence on her son.

Sure thing, Mrs. O. I’ll be the best example of a model citizen your worthless boy will ever see. Now why don’t you smile that playful smile and sing along to *Oye Como Va* on the radio? You *caliente chica* you!

“So,” Archer said, looking at each of us in turn. “Which one of you is going to drive me to Lawrence?”

“Count me out,” Virgil said. “I, uh…,” he turned away from Mrs. Olson and dropped his voice. “I’m temporarily without wheels.”

“What? What happened?” Archer demanded.

“I kind of…. I had a fender bender. Nothing really, but my car is in the shop. So, I’m not driving anywhere for a while.”

Earlier that summer, Virgil had gotten drunk at a party and rubbed his Oldsmobile Cutlass up against a tree like a cat marking territory. He’d been grounded from driving ever since.

“What about you?” Archer turned to Brian. “You have a car.”

Brian waved it off. “Sorry. I can’t.”

“What? Why not?”

Brian’s mom watched his mileage. He was allowed to take the car to and from school, occasionally drive to the mall, but he’d be killed if he showed up with a hundred miles ticked off the odometer.

“I just can’t,” Brian said using a tone and inflection that ended the discussion right then and there.

“Okay Shane,” Archer rolled his eyes in my direction. “What’s your excuse?”

“Me? I don’t have a car.”

“Your family has a car. You can borrow it.”

That is why we all loved Archer. Throwing attitude as if my family and I owed him the use of our car. My response was knee-jerk, spiteful, and inappropriate in front of his mother.

“Why doesn’t your daddy just buy you a car?” I asked.

Well, that little rejoinder hit a sensitive spot. Archer’s cheeks flushed red. Mrs. Olson kept her lips clamped around Mr. Misty and looked away.

Archer’s father was a very important military contractor who spent weeks-on-end away from home, hustling jetfighters in Wichita. He compensated for those prolonged absences by giving Archer every blessed toy, doohickey, electronic hoo-ha, or game a boy could want. In his basement, Archer had a pool table, a pinball machine, and a combination Galaxia/Pac Man arcade console. He had a television, VCR, Atari and stereo system set up in his bedroom. He owned two electric guitars and one keyboard. There was a trampoline in his backyard. In short, he was spoiled rotten.

Except for a car. In her humble Puerto Rican wisdom, Mrs. Olson must have recognized that her precious son was in danger of losing his *esencia* to the luxurious trappings of America. So, she drew the line at buying him a new car. Heck, if she could reach maturity without dysentery-free water, surely Archer could make the same journey without a Pontiac Firebird.

“Lame,” Archer snapped at me. “So lame.”

“I’m sorry Arch,” I apologized quickly, not wanting to start class-warfare in the local D.Q. “But no. I won’t be able to borrow the family car to go joyriding in Lawrence.”

“It’s not joyriding.” Archer got upset. Flustered. Talking loudly and moving his hands. “None of you take me seriously, but I’m a good actor. In all our school plays, I’m the only one who really cares about my performance. Everybody else just shows up and jokes around. They can barely remember their lines when the curtain goes up! I’m the one who carries the show. I’m the one who studies acting, not just shuffling around the stage mumbling. I work hard at it. And this could be my big break.”

Poor guy. I hated to see him get upset. And really, were his dreams of becoming a Hollywood movie star any more ridiculous than Virgil and Brian with their football scouts, or even me with my portfolio of comic book art? Besides, I’d been in a few of those school plays with Archer and, yes, he really did take it seriously. And maybe I carried some guilt because I was unquestionably one of those who just showed up to joke around. For whatever reason, I felt compelled to at least try and offer a solution. So, I opened my stupid mouth and made the biggest mistake of my life. Of all our lives.

“We could bike there.”

It was past dark by the time I got home. The first thing my mom said to me when I came through the door was, “It’s past dark.”

“I know mom,” I said. “I got hung up with Brian and some friends.”

“You shouldn’t be biking in the dark.”

“I know mom.”

“Call next time.”

“I will mom. Mom?”

“Yes.”

“Can I borrow the car on Tuesday?”

“Check with your sister.”

I went down the hall and knocked on my sister’s door. “What?” she said.

“Are you using the car on Tuesday?”

“Why?” she asked. She was home from college for summer break, but was still studying, sitting up in bed with her nose in a textbook.

“Just say you are.”

“Okay, I’m using the car on Tuesday.”

I returned to the living room where mom was knitting in front of the TV, Masterpiece Theatre turned on real low.

“She’s using the car.”

“Then I guess you’ll have to wait until she’s done.”

“Or you can let me bike to Lawrence.”

Mom put the needles down. “Bike to Lawrence?”

“Yeah. Archer wants to go try out for a movie they’re filming there and, since it turns out none of us will have a car, we figured we’d bike it instead.”

“Bike to Lawrence?”

“It’s not that far. We looked it up and it’s less than 40 miles. It won’t take us more than a few hours to get there. If we leave early enough, we can get there before noon and have the rest of the day for Archer to audition.”

“Then bike home in the dark?”

“No, we’ll spend the night at Virgil’s brothers. You remember Wyatt? He’s taking summer classes at KU and offered to let us stay at his apartment.”

“So, you’re biking to Lawrence, spending the night at some stranger’s apartment, and coming back the next day?”

“Right. Except Wyatt’s not a stranger.”

Mom sighed and started working her needles again. “Who else is going?”

“Just us four. Brian, Virgil, Archer and I.”

“And Brian’s mom is letting him go?”

“Absolutely. She thinks it’s a great idea. Good exercise, you know. Plus, we’ll have time to visit the campus, maybe check out the admissions office and talk to some people.” Truthfully, at that time I had no idea if Brian’s mom would let him go or not. In fact, I was quite certain that a few houses down the street, my good friend Brian was just then explaining to *his* mother that *my* mother had already given me permission.

We had been running that game on our respective mothers for years – since we were kids – and it always worked like a champ. Although our families went to the same Church, my mom and Mrs. Moody didn't really talk to each other beyond banal pleasantries and "Peace be with you…" "Also with you…" so they never caught on to the deception. And because my mother was impressed by Mrs. Moody's devotion and religious zeal, she figured that if Brian was allowed to do something, it had to be morally beneficial for me as well. Similarly, Mrs. Moody admired my mother's graduate degree and her career as a part-time instructor at the community college, so she felt certain that anything I was allowed to do would also benefit her son's intellectual development.

Psh. Suckers.

"Well, if Ms. Moody is okay with it – I guess I am too," Mom said.

"Thanks mom!" I said, hurrying away to my room before she changed her mind.

I didn't get very far. "Shane!" she yelled.

"What!" I yelled back. "I have to take a shower!"

"Some girl has been calling for you all night!"

A girl? For me? I went back to the living room.

"Who?"

"She said her name is Kimmy. She left her number; it's on the table."

Kimmy! The name flashed back a memory of meeting up with her the previous Sunday. I'd been riding my bike after working six hours at the hardware store, blowing off steam cruising the newly developed subdivisions down DeSoto road, when I passed by her house and she'd flagged me down.

She'd been doing yardwork in a bikini top and cutoffs. I clamped the handbrakes hard enough to create skid marks when I saw her jogging towards me, waving her arm. We talked by the side of the road until twilight. Eyes bold behind my knock-off Aviator sunglasses, I studied her chest the entire time. At one point she leaned in close to whisper an off-color remark about one of our teachers, as if she was telling a big secret she didn't want the cicadas to hear. I'm a good half-foot taller than Kimmy so she must have known she was giving me quite a view (freckles, by Jesus! And, oh shiver me timbers, would I kiss every golden one. And that birthmark.... My poor tongue ached for its chocolate sweetness). She hadn't seemed shy at all. In fact, after

we'd had our laugh, she stayed close, facing me with her shoulders wide, until we decided to give our legs a rest and sit on the curb.

Kimmy and I had been friends throughout High School. We always wound up in the same classes and chose each other for lab work. Last year we'd been debate partners and spent many long evenings together in the library scribbling notes on index cards. Of course, being a desperate virgin, I had long entertained the notion that I could maybe, possibly, someday, please God have sex with her. A couple of problems though: first and foremost, I was very shy and awkward around girls. Fortunately, I'd learned how to mask this almost paralyzing insecurity behind the façade of a disaffected *bel esprit*, always quick with a witty comment and far removed from the messy romantic entanglements suffered by my less sophisticated peers.

Won't let me get away with it eh? Okay then, I was a loud-mouth smart-ass who turned everything, including myself, into a joke. What? You mean girls don't find it sexy when you make farty sounds with your armpits or pretend to flick boogers at them? Really?

Which brings us to the second problem: Kimmy shared my sense of humor. That's not to say she found my antics sexy by any means, but I could always count on her to snort-laugh inappropriately when I crammed pencils in my ears, crossed my eyes, hung my tongue out and turned to her during a lull in Ms. Diak's English class. Walking the halls we would riff passionately upon the perils of colonialization in baaaad French accents. During lunch she would play the poofter and I would be the creep as we gleefully sang duet on Alice Cooper's *Billion Dollar Babies*. In short, we had a blast together.

Asking her on a date would have been like Groucho putting the moves on Chico.

Maybe not that bad. She looked one hell of a lot better than an Eastern European refugee and I didn't have the 'stash, but still.

The previous Sunday, however, had been different between us. Sure, I had been just as goofy and awkward as ever, but as the night wore on, we'd settled into a less vaudeville vibe and started relating to one another as, well, people. Sitting on the curb, leaning against the steps watching grasshoppers busily devouring the field across the street, we talked about life after high school. About college and career. I'd asked her what she wanted in a husband. She'd said someone who could make her laugh. I couldn't decide if I should kiss her or blow a raspberry on her belly.

Regrettably, I did neither. And then lost the opportunity entirely when I responded with some lame platitude like 'whoever he is will be a very lucky man'.

See? My awkwardness was near mythical. I was the Arthur Pendragon of High School nerds: The Once and Future Virgin.

What I needed was another chance. Kimmy liked me, of course she did; I just needed to get over my awkwardness. She was probably hoping I would ask her out – *a husband who can make me laugh*…. During school I made that girl laugh like a tent full of circus clowns before the second bell rang. That might not make me husband material, but it ought to be worth at least a tongue-kiss and some tit action.

I went to the kitchen, took the phone off the hook and dialed the number scrawled on the memo pad. It rang a few times and then a man's voice answered.

"Hello?"

"Uh, hello? Is uh Kimmy there?"

"Who's this?"

"Uh, Shane?"

"Hold on."

I heard the phone thump against a table then the man's voice yelled, "Kimmy! Phone!"

After a while, the man's voice said, "Some guy named Shane."

Immediately following that Kimmy got on the line. "Shane?" she asked.

"Hi!" I said.

"Hold on." There were rustling noises, and I heard Kimmy say. "I'll take it in my room. Hang up when I tell you."

I heard breathing on the line.

I put my hand over the mouthpiece so whoever was on the line couldn't hear my breathing.

Some more rustling and then Kimmy's voice again, "Okay, hang up…."

We both waited for the tell-tale click.

Click.

“Shane?”

“Kimmy?”

“Dad?”

Nothing.

“Okay, he’s gone.”

“Thank God. I mean, not that I have anything against your dad, but….”

“No, thank God is right. He doesn’t need to hear this conversation.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

“Shane I…I’m going to…I want…Ug…Phew, this is hard.”

“Are you okay?”

I heard a sniffle, or it might have been a snicker. When she talked again, her voice wavered with emotion.

“Can…can you come over?”

I checked the clock hanging over the refrigerator. It was almost 10:00. I didn’t have a set curfew, and my mom was cool about letting me stay out late, but it would be unusual for me to leave the house at ten on a Sunday. Plus, I’d already got permission to go biking – biking! – to Lawrence. I wasn’t sure how much currency I had left in the ol’ gimme bank.

Another flashback of Kimmy in her swimwear; brown freckles dusting the marble white swell of her breasts.

“I’ll be there. Ten minutes.”

“Thank you,” she said breathlessly and hung up.

I exhaled. Shrugged tension from my shoulders. Took a second to plan what I would say and then went to ask mom for the car keys.

Kimmy sat waiting on her front porch. She leapt to her feet when she saw me drive up, yelled something through the door, and then ran to my car before I could get out. She wore an oversized T and denim jeans that had been cut off mid-thigh. Her long, auburn hair – which she usually wore in a tail – was un-tethered and wild, giving her a

frantic look as she jogged around to the passenger's side, pulled open the door and threw herself in.

"Drive," she said. "Quick, before my parents see you."

I stood on the gas pedal. The Chrysler K car thought about it, decided it was okay, then cautiously accelerated away from the curb. We could've made a faster getaway walking. Fuck you very much, Mr. Iacocca.

"What's going on?" I asked, checking the rear-view mirror for an out-of-control father running down the street with a shotgun. Not that he'd have to run very fast to catch us. Goddamn American cars.

Kimmy turned to me. She leaned over and rested her hand on my knee. "Thank you for coming," she said, and then kissed me on the cheek.

I almost side-swiped a mailbox and the car jerked wildly as my driving leg spasmed under her touch. Kimmy yelped and sat back in her seat.

"Sorry," I mumbled. "Kind of startled me there."

Kimmy laughed nervously. "I know. Startled myself a little too."

"Kimmy, what's wrong? Are you okay?"

"Oh Shane," she rested a hand on my shoulder. "I'm fine. I just…I wanted to talk to you."

"Okay." Her hand felt like an asbestos glove full of hot coals on my skin. Aside from the occasional horseplay, Kimmy and I weren't the type of friends who touched each other. The physical contact made me jumpy. I didn't know how to respond. Should I touch her back? I took a chance and squeezed her knee – a real quick grocery-store-freshness check – then put my hand back on the wheel.

Smooth, Mr. Holloway. Smooth.

"I lied to my parents," Kimmy said. "I told them I was going with Heather to talk to a friend who just broke up with a boyfriend and was feeling suicidal. I hope they didn't see you."

"Well, it was dark. I can pass for Heather in the dark," I puckered my lips, batted my eyelashes, and flipped my hair like a supermodel.

Kimmy laughed. "Not quite."

We continued in silence until we stopped at the KS-7 intersection. Two expansive fields on either side, a highway in front, and whatever Kimmy was running from coming up fast from behind.

“Which way?” I asked.

“God, I don’t know,” she said. “Where do people go to park?”

“Park?”

“You know, park? Like to make out?”

Holy shit!

“Um…,” *okay, Shane, this is it. She’s coming on to you – her hand is still on your shoulder. Christ, she actually kissed you! Don’t blow it! Be smart, be cool, we can do this.* “I wouldn’t really know. I’ve never made out before. I know a back road behind the VA, next to the river, where I take my dog sometimes and let him run around. It’s pretty isolated.”

“That sounds good,” she said. “We can talk when we get there.”

Kimmy removed her hand from my shoulder. She folded her hands in her lap and sat quietly as I headed for the VA. I took this as a bad sign. She had probably been turned off by the whole *never made out before* thing. Either that, or, *I’ve never made out with a* girl *before, but we can go where I take my dog*. Oh yeah. I was blowing it.

There are times when the silent company of a good friend can be more comforting than any conversation. The austere drive to the park was not one of them. Kimmy didn’t say a word; she just sat there looking out the window while I literally started sweating, worrying that somehow, someway, I was fucking everything up. To my credit, I erred on the side of keeping my mouth shut. I felt certain that any dumb quip I tried would be ill-received. So, I kept it buttoned, kept my hands at three and nine, and let the anxiety boil my guts until we finally arrived at my dog’s favorite spot.

“Here we are,” I said, putting the car in park. It was, indeed, the most secluded place you could imagine. To get there, you had to take disused gravel access roads running parallel to the train tracks, turn off onto a grassy trail that, at some point, had been packed down by heavy utility vehicles, and slowly creep through a tunnel of trees until you came to a clearing that was about the size of a convenience store parking lot. You wouldn’t want to try getting there after a rainstorm and doing it at night wasn’t the brightest of ideas either, but I’d misspent enough of my youth running around those woods, I could maneuver the trails blindfolded.

And in the eerie dark of night, with a meager sliver of the summer moon hanging like a razor-hone scythe in the sky, you might be afraid of murderous mad men lurking in the shadows. Again, I knew from experience that there was so much dog shit piled around those trees, even the most twisted psycho would have trouble sneaking up on anyone while cursing and scrapping the bottoms of his shoes on any spot of grass that was still green.

“This is it,” I spoke again, shifting in my seat to face Kimmy.

“You weren’t kidding,” she said, taking it all in. “This is pretty isolated.”

“Oh yeah. Yeah, I always figured if I was ever going to dig up little Susie’s grave and build a cage with her bones, this is where I’d do it.” Okay, that wasn’t exactly cool, but, as I knew Kimmy was a Warren Zevon fan, it wasn’t as creepy as you might think.

“You always were an excitable boy,” she replied, getting it.

Her eyes met mine. We held each other’s gaze for a long time. I was practically bursting with the need to say something, but I knew – I just knew – that whatever came out of my mouth would be wrong. So, I sat and waited, hoping against hope that my eyes would not betray the screaming panic inside my head.

“Can we go outside?” Kimmy asked. “These four walls…,” she mimicked a bad mime-in-a-box. “Closing in on me!”

I laughed. “There’s a blanket in the trunk.”

Kimmy got out and walked a few paces from the car. There wasn’t much by way of scenery – just a bare rectangular field that probably used to house a metal shed or small Quonset hut for the railroad, overrun with scrubby grass and lined on all four sides by tall trees blocking the view of the river. But the sky was clear, the stars were bright, and the air had just enough of a summer chill to make it wonderful.

I collected the blanket from the trunk and joined Kimmy where she stood with her arms crossed under her breasts, gazing up at the sky.

“It’s really beautiful,” she said.

‘So are you.’…No, too corny… *Just say it!*…No! She’ll think I’m joking anyway… *‘So are you’! Say it! SAY IT!* …NO! It’s too late now anyway. The moment has passed…*Oh, you’ll die a virgin. A sad, pathetic virgin*…Shut up.

That’s just a sample of the internal debate that had been raging in my head all night.

“It is very pretty,” I eventually said.

“That is one thing I am going to miss,” she said dreamily. “The Kansas sky at night.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. Then it hit me. “Whoa whoa whoa. *Miss?* What are you talking about?”

“Spread the blanket, Shane,” she said touching my arm. “Let’s lie down and look at the sky.”

Kimmy was moving away. Her father was being transferred to England and, because he knew some people, she had been able to test for, and get into, an Oxford preparatory school. Two years in the prep school and she’d be accepted into Oxford.

Oxford.

Fuck a lot of Kansas University.

She held my hand as she told me this, both of us lying side by side, looking at the stars.

“And I am going to miss you,” she said when it was all over.

“My God Kimmy. I can’t believe it.”

She leaned up on her side, rested her head in her hand, and smiled down at me. She looked so beautiful in the faint moonlight; wild brown hair framing her perfect oval face, her soft hazel eyes wide and curious, and her full lips slightly parted as if waiting for something to happen.

Kiss her! …Are you crazy? I can’t kiss her; she just said she was leaving…*So? She fucking wants you to. Christ, she’s right there! KISS HER!*…But she’s leaving the country. What are we going to do? Date across the ocean?…*Who said anything about dating? Look, just sit up a little, put your arm around her and…*

“Oxford!” I exclaimed. “I’m going to know somebody at Oxford. Wow!”

Kimmy laughed. She put her other hand on my chest. “It’s not that big a deal.”

“Sure it is! That’s like where Isaac Newton studied.”

“Actually, he went to Cambridge. Benny Hill studied at Oxford.”

“That’s still pretty good.”

We smiled at each other for a while. Then Kimmy leaned in closer and said, very seriously, “Shane, there is something I want to do before I leave.”

“Uh…Yeah?”

“I want...,” She looked away. She shook her head and smirked. “This shouldn’t be so hard.”

“What is it?”

“Okay. You have to promise you won’t make fun of me or be mean or anything.”

Now I sat up and looked at her earnestly. “Kimmy! I would never be mean to you.”

“You sometimes make fun of me.”

“No! I do? No, I don’t! Really? You think I make fun of you?”

“You do. Sometimes.”

“Oh God, Kimmy, I’m so sorry. I never intend to…or would ever want to make fun of you. When have I made fun of you?”

“Shane.” She pushed me down. “Relax. I know you don’t do it maliciously. You’re just an excitable boy.” She hovered over me, so close loose strands of her hair fell and tickled my cheeks. “But I don’t want you to joke about this.”

“No,” I croaked. “I promise. No jokes.”

“I want you to make love to me.”

Unable to speak, I nodded my head.

“Is that a yes?”

I nodded faster.

She kissed me. Our lips parted. Her tongue entered my mouth. I grabbed her ferociously around the waist and crushed her body against mine. She gasped.

“Shane!”

“Oh God!” I let go. “Sorry! I am so sorry!”

“No! No, it’s okay. It’s just…” She rolled off me. Her hand traveled down my stomach, stopping at the top of my jeans. “Ah jeeze,” she said, looking at the bulge between my legs that was about to make a lie of the dungaree’s slogan *can’t bust ‘em*.

There was no way to hide it, and there were no mental tricks I could employ quickly enough to bring it down. I suppose whacking it with a sledgehammer might have worked – provided the hammer didn’t crack. But since I didn’t have one handy, all I could hope for was a sudden, dignified death.

Then Kimmy did the unexpected. She reached down and stroked it.

I shuddered. I even came a little. But – and I’m no medical doctor, so I’m not sure this is exactly what happened – but my butthole clenched so tight, it sucked all the juice from my balls into my colon.

So much for a dignified death.

“Shane,” Kimmy whispered, her hand resting on my throbbing boner. “I want to know what this is like.”

“Kimmy…I…”

“Jesus, Shane. You’re shaking like a leaf!”

“…yeah…”

“Are you okay?”

“…uh, yeah…?”

“What?”

I sighed. Kimmy lay on top of me. She kissed me softly. “What’s wrong?” she asked.

“I…I don’t know what I’m doing.”

“Mmmm,” she kissed me again. “Neither do I. I thought we’d learn together.”

More kissing. This time I was gentler with my hands. I slid them under her shirt and rubbed her back. I made an explorative move to her sides, touching her breasts. She kissed me harder when I did. Encouraged, I went for the bra strap. After a few unsuccessful tries at unhooking it, Kimmy reached back and with a deft, one-handed maneuver freed herself. She fell back onto me, mouth meeting mouth.

I pushed the bra away and went at it with enthusiasm. Her tongue filled my mouth as I circled her nipples with my thumbs. I sucked her tongue, released it, then dipped my head and kissed her neck. She moaned and stretched. I licked the underside of her chin. Then, working my way up, I nibbled her ear.

That must have hit a spot because she yipped pleasurably and pulled away. She adjusted her legs and sat on my stomach. We locked our eyes. She tilted her head slightly and grinned. She lowered her eyelids, whispered something I couldn't hear, and then took off her shirt.

"Oh Kimmy…," I tried to find words to express myself. "Ah…," Nothing seemed quite appropriate. "Kimmy…," And finally I realized there were better things I could be using my mouth for anyway.

I started with the collar bone, tracing it with my tongue. All the while my hands held her softly around the ribcage. I felt her body tremble with every breath. She made low sounds in the back of her throat as I kissed and licked her chest. When I dared open my eyes, I saw blossoms of blush on her perfect skin, making Rorschach patterns across her flesh. I wasn't quite sure what that was all about, but I took it as a good sign.

Her hands on the back of my head guided me to her breasts. She gasped when my teeth closed around a hardened nipple. I ran my tongue over the raised gooseflesh of her areolas. She pulled me close. I wrapped my arms tightly around her. She held my face in her hands, leaned down and pressed her lips to mine. And as if by magic the whole wide world disappeared. It was now just us two, alone in the night, trying to solve the mystery one touch at a time.

At some point I lost my shirt and found myself on top. The feel of skin-on-skin caused quite a frenzy, and we kissed passionately, feverishly, while I ground my pelvis between her legs.

This went on for a long, long time. Kimmy showed no intention of stopping me. She moved against me, played her hands over my body, and matched me kiss-for-kiss.

What the hell are you waiting for? Christmas?…Should I?…*No, of course not. Just keep doing what you're doing and eventually you'll strike oil. Now stop thinking and do it!*…God, I don't know. What if…? *Oh come on! She's got her fucking legs hooked around your lily ass. Feel that? Yeah, that's right. She wants it just as bad*…Saints preserve us.

I rolled off to one side and began a southbound journey, using my lips and tongue to blaze a trail. I paused at the belly button. There was a wispy patch of soft, almost

imperceptible brown hair below her navel. I brushed my hand over her lower stomach until it rested on the button of her cutoffs. I started fiddling with the button.

“Shane…,” she said.

“Mmmm?”

She grabbed my hand and led it away from her pants. She brought it to her lips and kissed the palm. “It’s late. We’d better go.”

Damn. *Damn!*

Even though I’d been tossed out at third, I was still ready to propose marriage on the ride home. Kimmy, bless her heart, snuggled up next to me and kept her hand on my thigh as I drove. It would be many years before the phrase ‘lasting more than four hours’ entered the lexicon of popular culture, but I had been sporting some form of wood – running the gambit from pine to petrified forest – since Kimmy first pecked my cheek at around ten o’clock.

It was two o’clock now.

I was exhausted, dazed, delirious, and happy. The perfect example of a love-sick fool.

“Shane?” Kimmy said, rubbing my leg.

“Mmmm?”

“We’re going to need…You know…Protection.”

Booster rockets ignited. The car took flight. It punched a hole in the sky, circled the moon, and came back down for landing.

“Uh…Okay.” I said.

“And, actually…I’m leaving in two weeks. Less than two weeks. So, we need to…you know. Plan something. Soon.”

“Okay.”

“I was thinking Friday night?”

“Yeah. Yes, absolutely. Whenever.”

“And you’ll be able to get the…protection?”

“Yes. Yes, yes.”

“And that’ll give us the whole weekend.” She ran a finger up the inside of my thigh until it hit dogwood. She tugged my earlobe with her lips then whispered, “So buy more than one.”

Eeep.

Then an unpleasant clarity started to shine, clearing away the horny haze that had been clouding my head. “So, when exactly are you leaving?” I asked.

“School starts on the 30th, but I’ll be getting there a week early to settle. The 23rd.”

It was the 8th. Well, the 9th.

Like the lady said, less than two weeks.

“Oh.”

Kimmy breathed deeply through her nose and then exhaled. She moved away from me and the absence of her warmth felt strange and unreal.

“I don’t want to show up in London like some naïve, country girl,” she said, looking out the side window.

And the light of truth exploded in my brain like a supernova.

“You’re going to break my heart, aren’t you?”

Kimmy didn’t reply. Her eyes were fixed on the stars spinning around the Kansas sky.

I pulled into Kimmy’s driveway, put the car in park and cut the engine. Kimmy sat there with her hands folded in her lap. There was no smiling, no touching. No mischievous glances, no flirtatious gestures. Just a confused girl sitting next to an equally mixed-up boy; both wondering what the hell they were getting themselves into.

“We don’t have to go through with it,” she said, raising a shoulder. “If you think it’s wrong.”

It was hard looking at her and not remembering all the hidden places my hands had explored, my lips had touched. The thought of losing those treasures was damned near unbearable. And it could only get worse if we went through with it.

Hell, yes it was wrong. Any fool could see that.

Ah, but I wasn't just *any* fool.

"No, I want to do it. With you. I mean, we all have to do it sometime, right? Why not with you?"

Would it help if I dragged you out of the car and slammed your head in the door a few times? Would that make you less stupid?…Couldn't hurt…*Try again and this time?*…Yeah?…*Don't fuck up!*

"What I mean to say, Kimmy, is that I love…I would love to do it with you. I really don't mind that you're moving away. Ah. I mean, I do mind. But I would mind even if we never did it because I really like you as a friend. And I'm going to miss you terribly no matter what happens between us. But if we do…do it…I wouldn't mind. That."

I'm going to invent a time machine, go back to the day you were born and shoot you in the head…Thank you…*Don't mention it. Idiot.*

"I don't want to hurt you, Shane," Kimmy said. "Maybe it is a bad idea."

"No! No, in a way it makes perfect sense. Because I always wondered what it would be like to…to…to be with you. But then, you know, we're such good friends it would seem awkward, right? Well, that and I figured you didn't like me in that way anyway –"

"– I did."

"You did?"

"Well. Sometimes." She gave me a smile, and I almost wept in gratitude. I wasn't fucking this up too badly after all.

"So, see? If we do this, then we'll both know. And because we're such good friends, it'll be special between us. Something we'll share forever. Your first time. My first time. It'll be like…Special."

The front porch light flared to life. Kimmy's eyes popped and her mouth formed an 'O'. "My dad!" she cried, clawing at the door handle.

"Oh shit!" I turned the key and started the engine.

"I'll call you!" she said, scrambling from the car. "Friday night!"

I watched her run for the house. A large, hairy forearm opened the screen door.

I backed out of the driveway quickly, sitting low and hunched over, hoping to obscure the fact that I wasn't Heather. I cleared the street, slammed it in drive, and punched the gas. The K car chuckled at my foolishness and proceeded to move forward at its own pace. Faster than a snail, but not quite as ambitious as a turtle. Show me a petition to sell Michigan back to Canada and I'll sign that bitch with a Sharpie. Twice.

My head was pretty much a total wreck on the drive home. I wanted to tear down the moon; I wanted to hide in a cave. I wanted to scream out my lungs; I wanted to drive off a cliff. I wanted to run until I collapsed; I wanted to castrate myself with an ax.

I wanted Kimmy and I to be together and in love forever.

I wanted to just get fucking laid.

I shifted in the seat and felt a sharp, searing pain as the tip of my penis tore away from my underwear. During the night's activities, secretions had leaked and hardened, gluing my dickhole to the cotton weave.

Ey-ouch.

But the pain didn't last long at all. And that moment of agony was but a trifle compared to the hours of glory I'd just experienced. It had been worth it. Unquestionably worth it.

Lesson learned, dear penis. Lesson learned.